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ABSTRACT

Although the disappointing results of earlier ex-offender programs convinced many that "nothing works so let's just keep prisoners incarcerated longer," research in the 1980s and 1990s has shown that intensive pre-release employment training and post-release employment programs and support can cut the rate of recidivism. Current initiatives include those conducted by nonprofit organizations and funded by the federal Office of Correctional Job Training and Placement (OCJTP). Characteristics shared by these nonprofit programs include the following: (1) program participants are largely minority males who lack high school diplomas and work experience and were convicted of non-violent drug-related offenses; (2) programs have formal contracts with local or state criminal justice agencies; (3) they need strong working relationships with employers; (4) they are helped by the availability of jobs produced by a strong economy; (5) recruitment of, and outreach to, participants are seldom a problem; (6) provision of transitional employment is a top priority; (7) post-placement services must be strong; (8) staff is crucial to program success; and (9) funding comes from criminal justice and workforce development agencies and private foundations and donors. Challenges for organizations that serve ex-offenders include providing continuity of services, expanding work force development strategies, and handling the impact of welfare reform. Developing trends point to supporting more effective practices, combining income and skills development, improving continuity of services, increasing investment, and expanding research efforts. (Five case studies of nonprofit ex-offender programs and 32 references are included.) (KC)

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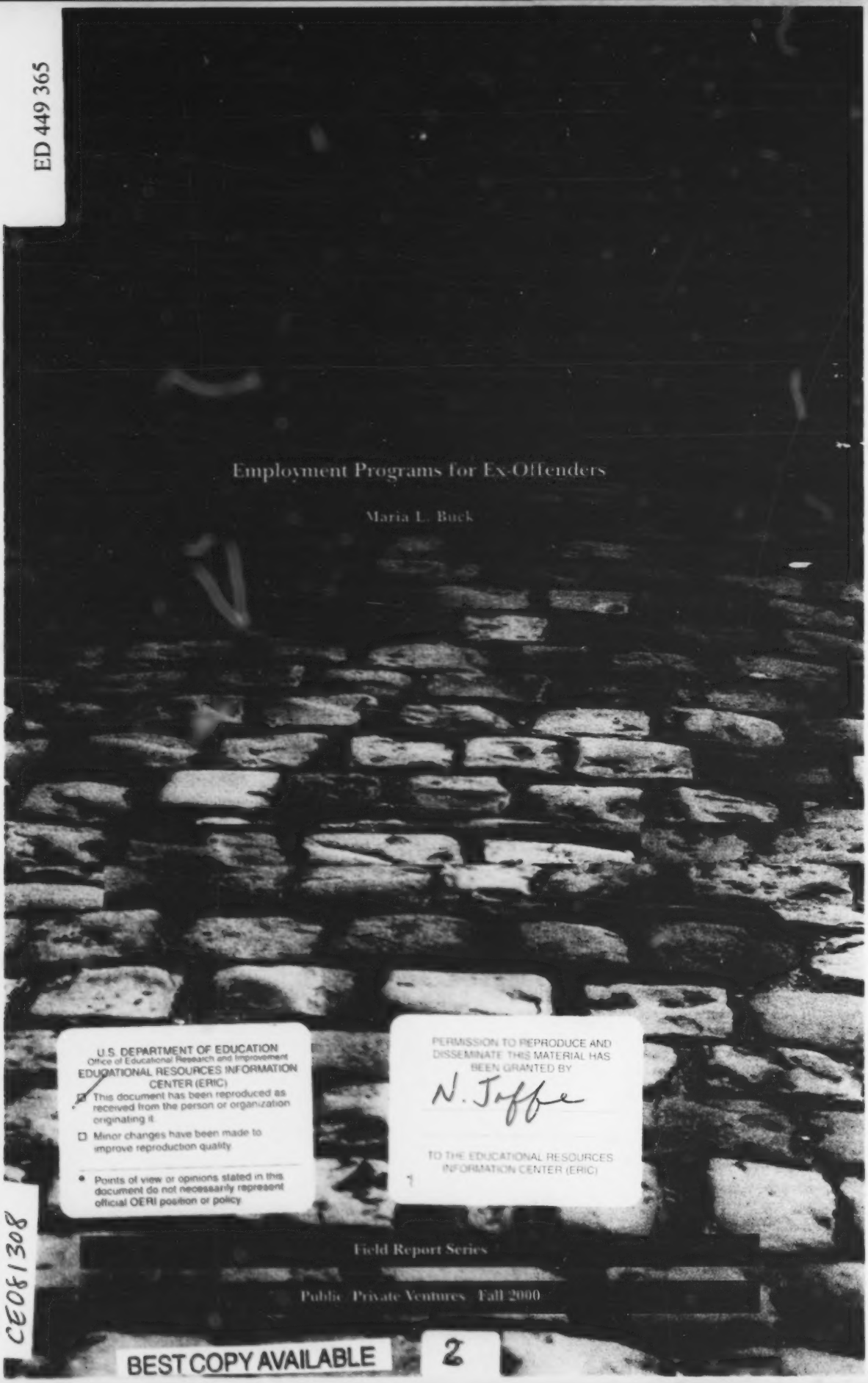

Employment Programs for Ex-Offenders

Maria L. Buck

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GETTING BACK TO WORK

Employment Programs for Ex-Offenders

Maria L. Buck

Field Report Series

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Introduction

Nearly six million people are currently in the criminal justice system—1.8 million inmates, 700,000 parolees and 3.4 million probationers. For subsets of the population, the numbers are even more alarming. It is estimated that in 1999 one of every nine black non-Hispanic men aged 25 to 29 was in prison (Beck, 2000). In addition, 500,000 people are released from prison every year (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1996). Given these extraordinary numbers, addressing the employment needs of ex-offenders presents a major challenge for the workforce development field. There are four major reasons for the increased attention to getting ex-offenders back to work: the strong economy, increasing incarceration rates, increasing incarceration costs and the "success" of welfare reform.

As the country continues its unprecedented economic growth and enjoys the lowest unemployment levels in 30 years, employers are scrambling for workers. Companies once hesitant to hire ex-offenders are now participating in prison job fairs and actively recruiting and hiring them. Practitioners are expanding their programs and building better relationships with employers—relationships they hope will last longer than the current economic boom.

The 1.8 million people who are currently incarcerated represent a nearly 60 percent increase from 1990. There are two primary reasons for this increase: inmates are staying in prison longer and more ex-offenders are returning to prison. Between 1990 and 1997, the average time served by released inmates increased from 22 to 27 months, and the time expected to be served by inmates entering prison also grew, from 38 to 43 months. Furthermore, there is a small but growing number of inmates (10%) who will serve 20 years or more before release, and 5 percent who will never be released. At the same time, more ex-offenders are returning to prison. From 1990 to 1997, the percentage of new admissions to state prisons because of parole violation increased from 29 percent to just under 35 percent—more than one in every three new admissions (Beck and Mumola, 1999).

Associated with the increasing rates of incarceration are skyrocketing costs. In 1995, $39.8 billion was spent on corrections nationwide, which includes costs incurred for jails, prisons, parole and probation. From 1985 to 1995, the federal government saw a 329 percent increase in correction expenditures (in 1995 constant dollars), while states experienced a 179 percent increase, owing in part to prison construction (Gifford and Lindgren, 1999). Rising costs and increased recidivism are putting more pressure on policymakers to slow this revolving door.

Finally, welfare reform efforts to move people off the rolls and into the workforce appear fairly successful. The number of people receiving welfare benefits (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF]) fell 49 percent from August 1996 to December 1999, from 12 million to 6.6 million recipients (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). Many of the characteristics of the welfare population, particularly educational level and work history, are similar to those of ex-offenders. Therefore, there is a growing sentiment that the program techniques used to lower the welfare rolls could be effective in reducing recidivism among ex-offenders. Furthermore, new resources are becoming available to serve ex-offenders. While welfare caseloads have plummeted, federal funding for TANF has remained fixed. Currently, nearly $4.7 billion of federal TANF funds have been unobligated by states (Lazere, 2000). These surpluses are available to serve other disadvantaged populations, including ex-offenders. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Labor has targeted the needs of noncustodial parents in the current round of Welfare-to-Work grants. Most inmates are noncustodial parents: 63 percent of men and 78 percent of women behind bars are parents (Harlow, 1994). Thus

additional interest and resources are now being focused on the ex-offender population.

Previous Work with Ex-Offenders:[1] The First 30 Years

With an influx of federal dollars, a host of ex-offender employment programs was launched in the early 1960s along with many other social programs. Recognizing the poor educational and job market experiences of offenders, program developers wanted to determine if addressing these deficiencies would reduce recidivism.

By the early 1970s, program operators, developers and funders sought to determine the effectiveness of these efforts and launched extensive research on the new crop of programs. The research disclosed "uniformly negative results." Commissioned by the U.S. Department of Labor's Manpower Administration, Rovner-Pieczenik (1973) found that few programs produced a significant decline in recidivism. The author did point out several implementation problems, particularly difficulty in "persuading correctional institutions to focus on education and post-release objectives, as well as the extreme deficits of inmates, who generally were high school dropouts reading several years below grade level with no discernible job skills" (Bushway and Reuter, 1997).

These disappointing results were magnified in Martinson's seminal work, "What Works? Questions and Answers about Prison Reform" (1974). Described as "the most politically important criminology study of the past half century" (Miller, 1989), Martinson's analysis of 231 studies on offender rehabilitation championed the belief that "nothing works" in the field of rehabilitation for offenders. Martinson concluded, "Rehabilitative efforts that have been reported so far have no appreciable effect on recidivism."

Though this philosophy pervaded criminal justice circles, research on the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs continued, particularly those centered around employment. Evaluations conducted throughout the 1970s examined various types of programs and their effectiveness for ex-offenders, including "regular" employment and training programs, and income support initiatives. However, many of the studies had methodological weaknesses. Many relied on matched comparison groups of offenders (those who elected to enroll in the program treatment and a matched comparison group that did not enter the program). These evaluations suffer from selection bias in that those who volunteer for a program are more motivated than those who do not. Therefore, it could be the participants' motivation and not the program that accounts for differences between the two groups.

During the period of high unemployment in the 1970s, several programs were developed to offer both income supports and job placement assistance to ex-offenders in an effort to reduce crime. The Transitional Aid Research Project (TARP) offered ex-offenders varying levels of unemployment compensation and job placement assistance. Random assignment studies of TARP in Texas and Georgia found that no combination of job placement or income assistance reduced recidivism (Berk et al., 1980).

TARP was based on a smaller-scale program in Baltimore, known as Living Insurance for Ex-Offenders (LIFE), which tested a similar strategy of combining job training assistance and income supports. An evaluation determined that ex-offenders in the financial aid treatment group had 8.6 percent fewer re-arrests for property crimes than did those in the control or the job assistance-only group. However, the research also found that the income supports actually created a disincentive for ex-offenders to find employment, reducing the number of hours they worked (Berk et al., 1980).

The Vera Institute of Justice embarked on several ex-offender programs in the early 1970s, starting with pre-trial interventions, in which nonserious offenders could participate in a 90-day job training and placement program. If they were successful, the charges against them were dismissed. The first study of this program used a basic comparison group model and found that 15.8 percent of participants recidivated after one year compared with 31 percent of the comparison group and noncompleters (Vera Institute of Justice, 1970). A second study eight years later was more rigorous and randomly assigned participants to treatment and control groups. The results found no statistically significant differences between the two groups (Baker and Sadd, 1981). However, it should be noted that administration of the program had been incorporated into the New York City Department of Corrections and had vastly expanded in scope.

In the late 1970s, a series of evaluations examined how well more traditional employment and training programs were serving the needs of the ex-offender population. The National Supported Work Demonstration was one of the first major evaluations of employment programs to use random assignment and thus eliminate selection bias. The program assigned participants to 12 to 18 months of unsubsidized employment in a supportive work environment under conditions of gradually increasing demands, close supervision and work in crews of peers. The program targeted four distinct populations: long-term female welfare recipients, former substance abusers, ex-offenders and young school dropouts. Piliavin and Gartner (1981) concluded that the program initially had a strong positive impact on employment for ex-offenders, but by the end of the first year, the impact dissipated and outcomes for the treatment and control groups were nearly identical. Perhaps more important, there was no impact on re-arrest rates.

Attention Shifts to Employment: The 1990s

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, researchers began to focus more on the link between employment and recidivism. Perhaps the best field study on the effect of employment on recidivism was conducted by Miles Harer. Harer (1994) examined a representative sample of 1,205 federal prisoners who were released in the first six months of 1987; he showed how their pre-prison, prison and post-prison characteristics and experiences related to recidivism three years after their release. In other words, Harer looked at the characteristics of ex-offenders rather than at programs to determine if they had any effect on recidivism. Some highlights of the evaluation follow:

- Recidivism rates were higher among blacks and Hispanics than among whites—58.8 percent of black and 45.2 percent of Hispanic releasees recidivated compared with 33.5 percent of whites.
- People who were employed full time or who attended school *before* they entered prison had a recidivism rate of 25.6 percent versus 60.2 percent for those not so engaged.
- People living with a spouse after release had lower recidivism rates than did those with other post-release living arrangements—20 percent living with a spouse recidivated versus 47.9 percent with other release arrangements.
- The more educational programs prisoners successfully completed, the lower the recidivism rate. Inmates who completed at least one training program per each six months of their prison term recidivated at a rate of 35.5 percent versus 44.1 percent of those who did not successfully complete any courses.

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- Prisoners who had arranged for post-release employment prior to release had lower recidivism rates than did those who did not make such arrangements; 27.6 percent of those arranging for post-release employment recidivated compared with 53.9 percent of those who made no plans.

Finn and Willoughby (1996) examined outcomes for ex-offenders participating in Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) programs in Georgia in 1989-90. The ex-offender sample of 521 was compared with a random sample of 734 other JTPA participants who were matched with ex-offenders on barriers to employment or economic disadvantage. Using Georgia Department of Labor documents, the study concluded that status as an ex-offender had no effect on employment. It did find that those who were unemployed for 15 months prior to participation were less likely to be employed after completing a JTPA program. It also found that those participants involved in employer-based training were more likely to be employed, both at program completion and at 14-week follow-up. This suggested that skill level and work experience, not ex-offender status, had strong effects on outcomes.

Saylor and Gaes' (1996) research on the Post Release Employment Program (PREP) examined 7,000 inmates in federal prison and followed them for eight years to determine the effect of participation in prison industries or vocational education and apprenticeships on the former inmates' institutional adjustment, post-release employment and recidivism. Both short-term and long-term findings were encouraging. After 12 months, 10 percent of the comparison group had returned to prison, while only 6 percent of the study participants had returned. Both rates were lower than the overall recidivism rates for federal ex-offenders. In terms of employment, 72 percent of the participants found and maintained employment compared with 63 percent of the comparison group. Both of these results were statistically significant. There was also a difference in wages ($821/month for program participants versus $769/month for the comparison group), although this was not statistically significant.

At the eight-year follow-up, the prison-industry subgroup had 20 percent longer survival times (length of time before committing a new offense) than did the comparison group. And the participants in vocational training and apprenticeships had 28 percent longer survival times. Employment rates were not available for the eight-year follow-up. Although the study suffers from selection bias, it offers some evidence of the impact on recidivism. However, the study examined only federal inmates and their return to federal prison; no analysis was done on subsequent incarcerations to state or local facilities.

Another promising finding comes from the evaluation of the Opportunities to Succeed (OPTS) program. Designed to reduce substance abuse relapse and criminal recidivism, the program model provides a variety of services to ex-offenders, including intensive supervision, mandatory substance abuse treatment, employability training (such as basic education, vocational training and job search assistance), housing, family intervention services and parenting skills, and medical and mental health services. Initiated as a three-year demonstration in 1994, the preliminary employment findings are promising. In a random assignment evaluation, Rossman et al. (1998) found that 82 percent of the OPTS group had a full-time job during their first year of community-based supervision compared with 73 percent of the control group. Although the program looked at a specific subset of ex-offenders (substance abusers) and relied on self-reported information, the employment outcomes are promising.

These results have helped solidify the link between employment and recidivism. Current research is seeking to identify the

Recidivism

One major issue for ex-offenders and the employment programs that serve them is recidivism—the rate at which they are re-arrested, re-convicted or re-incarcerated. One of the most comprehensive studies of recidivism examined re-arrest, re-conviction and re-incarceration rates for a sample of released prisoners in 1983. As Table 1 indicates, 63 percent were re-arrested for a felony or serious misdemeanor within three years of release (Beck and Shipley, 1989).

Table 1

Time After Release	*Re-arrested (%)*	*Re-convicted (%)*	*Re-incarcerated (%)*
6 months	25	11.3	8.4
1 year	39.3	23.1	18.6
2 years	54.5	38.3	32.8
3 years	62.5	46.8	41.4

What are they going back to prison for? In a 1991 survey of parole and probation violators in state prison, 43 percent of parole violators were arrested and convicted of a new offense. The remaining violations were technical, including failing to report to parole officer (34.2%), leaving jurisdiction (14.1%) and testing positive for drug use (10.2%). The numbers for probationers were significantly different. Eighty-seven percent were arrested and convicted of a new crime, resulting in re-incarceration, followed by 11.5 percent for failure to pay fines, restitution, or other financial obligations (Cohen, 1995).

successful *components* of ex-offender programs. Several programs have begun such examinations, including Project RIO in Texas, the Safer Foundation in Chicago and the Center for Employment Opportunities in New York.

Recent Research: A Focus on Content

Menon et al. (1992) examined the employment and recidivism rates for participants in Project RIO's program, comparing them to a matched comparison group of releasees who did not participate. Project RIO is a collaboration between the Texas Workforce Commission and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice; it provides vocational, educational and job preparation services for inmates and then refers ex-offenders to local Workforce Commission Centers, where RIO assessment specialists work with ex-offenders and their parole officers to find employment (Finn ["Texas' Project RIO"], 1998). The evaluation found that 69 percent of RIO participants found employment versus 36 percent of the comparison group after the first year of release. In addition, the program affected recidivism during the first year after release: 48 percent of RIO participants were re-arrested compared with 57 percent of non-RIO parolees, and only 23 percent were re-incarcerated compared with 38 percent of non-RIO parolees. While this study also suffers from selection bias, it is one of the few evaluations of an individual program with positive results.

The Safer Foundation is beginning to follow up on some very preliminary research done on its own work. An evaluation compared 100 clients who completed Safer's pre-employment program in 1992 with the other 9,844 releasees from the Illinois Department of Corrections in 1989. The analysis found a recidivism rate of 8 percent for Safer participants compared with 46 percent for the comparison group. However, given the

large inequities between the two groups (sample sizes, dates of analysis and time interval for analysis—18 months for Safer participants versus 36 months for other parolees), more work remains to be done (Finn ["Chicago's Safer Foundation"], 1998). Since this evaluation, Safer has begun laying the groundwork for an in-depth evaluation.

Further, the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) recently commissioned the Vera Institute of Justice to conduct an analysis of the factors associated with CEO clients' ability to retain good jobs. The evaluation found that most offender characteristics, such as age, gender and race, did not correlate with employment after transitional work. But the analysis did find two factors that improved retention: motivation and reliability, as demonstrated by high attendance and short stays in transitional work; and the types of jobs, in industries with good benefits and higher wages. The study also recognized other factors that may affect retention, such as history of work experience, strength of social support systems and level of fringe benefits, but these require additional research.

In sum, over the past 30 years, research on employment programs for ex-offenders has had mixed results. The "nothing works" conclusion of the 1970s prompted public and political views on crime to take a decided turn in the early 1980s. Abandoning the emphasis on rehabilitation, this era took a tougher stance on crime, with new mandatory sentencing guidelines and an explosion in spending on new prisons. Bushway and Reuter's review of the literature (1997) concludes that "even after 30 years of trying...no program...has consistently shown itself capable (through a rigorous random assignment evaluation) of decreasing recidivism through labor market oriented programs" (p.256). However, as research continued in the 1980s and 1990s, promising results emerged on the connection between post-release employment and recidivism rates.

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An Overview of Current Activities

Federal Initiatives

Since the late 1980s, several federal agencies have begun initiatives that examine and strengthen the connection between prison and post-prison services, with an eye toward reducing recidivism.

The Office of Correctional Education (OCE) in the U.S. Department of Education has been a leader in this area with a series of demonstration grants beginning in the late 1980s. The early programs focused on specific skill enhancements, such as functional literacy and vocational education and training. The most recent initiative moves OCE further toward post-release services and issues of recidivism. The grantees of the Life Skills for State and Local Prisoners program are testing a wide variety of life skills models, many of which include employment components, to determine their effect on recidivism. OCE defines life skills to include self-development, communication skills, job and financial skills development, education, interpersonal and family relationship development, and stress and anger management. Two rounds of grants were awarded in 1994 and 1997, with another competition anticipated in 2000. A report on the progress and outcomes of these grants is due later this year. OCE is also conducting an evaluation of the role of correctional education and recidivism in three states. Early results from this research are also due later this year.

As a result of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, the Office of Correctional Job Training and Placement (OCJTP) was created to coordinate efforts of federal agencies and others to improve job training and placement programs for offenders. Its first task was to conduct a survey of all offender training and placement programs, both in and out of prison.

Director John Moore leads the office's efforts to collect and disseminate information on ex-offender job-training and placement programs and to provide technical assistance to local training and employment agencies to advance ex-offender services. Most important, OCJTP has launched a series of training workshops for staff working with ex-offenders. Recently, OCJTP developed training seminars for offender employment specialists that have been endorsed by the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals. Since 1997, sessions offered through the National Institute of Correction Training Academy in Colorado have been attended by teams of staff members from correction agencies and nonprofit organizations who provide skills training and placement services to offenders.

OCJTP has also served as a catalyst for bringing practitioners together to share best practices and identify developing issues. In the past several years, OCJTP has organized two forums, one for corrections and criminal justice staff and the other for administrators of ex-offender programs. These meetings identified issues for further investigation, including identifying legislation for ex-offender programs at the state and federal levels, building existing networks and partnerships, examining job retention strategies for ex-offenders, and developing staff who work in ex-offender programs.

In 1996, the Federal Bureau of Prisons launched the Inmate Placement Program Branch, which has focused on the following activities: holding mock job fairs in federal prisons; posting job openings in prisons; establishing employment resource centers in prisons to help inmates prepare resumes and access job opening information, and to provide related job-search and job-

retention skills; establishing procedures to ensure that all inmates have portfolios of documents relevant to employment; and serving as a clearinghouse for information and technical assistance related to inmate employment-enhancement programs. Since 1996, about 2,160 inmates and 700 employers and community-based agencies have participated in 45 job fairs at 35 federal institutions nationwide.

Spearheading most of these new federal initiatives has been the National Institute of Justice (NIJ). As the research and development branch of the U.S. Department of Justice, NIJ supports research, evaluations and demonstration programs in an effort to improve and strengthen the criminal justice system. With the 1994 Crime Bill, NIJ expanded its efforts and partnerships with other federal agencies. Most recently, NIJ, OCJTP and OCE have jointly funded efforts to provide more descriptive information about innovative programs in the fields of offender education and job training and placement. As a result, they have issued a series of reports, called *Program Focus*, highlighting case studies of promising programs in the areas of employment, life skills and prison industries, many of which became the foundation for this report.

As a result of the popularity of these reports, a new periodical, *Offender Employment Report*, has just been developed as a vehicle for dialogue about offender programs, sharing promising practices about programmatic strategies and partnerships.

State Initiatives

The resurgence of interest in ex-offender programs has manifested in a plethora of state initiatives. In their departments of corrections and parole, as well as labor and welfare, states are developing new employment programs for ex-offenders. Most state initiatives have the explicit goal of reducing recidivism in an attempt to curtail the costs of incarceration. Three innovative programs—Operation TOP-STEP in Georgia, Montgomery County Pre-release Center in Maryland, and Offender Job Linkage in Ohio—are highlighted in the following text boxes.

Role of Criminal Justice Policy

The changes in criminal justice policies over the past several years, particularly the Truth in Sentencing movement, have had a major influence on the field.

Truth in Sentencing initiatives impose determinate sentences on convicted criminals and ensure that offenders actually serve the majority of their sentence in prison. This is seen as the elimination of parole: offenders who are given a determinate sentence must complete their entire sentence in jail or prison instead of being allowed to conclude it on parole in the community. Currently, 12 states have abolished parole, and an additional 12 use determinate sentencing policies (Criminal Justice Institute, 1998).

The effect of these policies has yet to be fully determined. However, anecdotal evidence from states indicates an unusual community response to these new initiatives. On the one hand, there is a growing perception that criminals are never getting out. In fact, however, only about 5 percent of offenders are sentenced to life in

prison; average sentences last about two years. But because of the rhetoric surrounding elimination of parole, public perception is that we do not have to worry about ex-offenders because there are none. This leads to difficulty in raising awareness and support for ex-offender programs.

One the other hand, Truth in Sentencing initiatives have refocused criminal justice agencies on release services. Previously, it was difficult to gauge exactly when an inmate would be released on parole. With Truth in Sentencing, the day someone walks into prison, he or she and the corrections staff know exactly when he or she will be walking out, allowing for more planning for release. As a corrections official from Ohio stated, "[Truth in Sentencing] allows for pre-release services to start from day one of their sentence instead of 30 days before their actual release."

Georgia—Operation TOPSTEP

In Georgia, a collaboration between the Departments of Parole and Labor has created Operation TOPSTEP. Initiated in 1998, the program progresses in three steps with clear pre- and post-release components.

In Step 1, inmates collect necessary documentation, such as birth certificates and Social Security cards, in preparation for release. A revamped prison-industries program offers inmates opportunities for work experience in fields that are in demand. In the Mobile Construction Unit, for example, inmates learn a trade and gain experience in one of the most in-demand occupations in the state.

Step 2 also occurs in prison. Department of Labor staff conduct job preparedness workshops that assess inmates' job readiness, review programs completed while in prison, and design resumes. This packet of information is then forwarded to an inmate's parole officer upon release.

Once released, ex-offenders enter Step 3. At their first meeting with their parole officer, they are assigned to one or more of four tracks: employment, education, substance abuse or cognitive skills training. All ex-offenders are initially placed in the employment track, with simultaneous enrollment in other tracks as necessary. Ex-offenders are then referred to local Department of Labor offices for employment services.

Previously, parole had operated as a "bean counting" function; parole officers were expected to make a certain number of contacts with ex-offenders each month. Now, parole is shifting its performance measures for officers to coincide with the goals of the four-track system. Since the program has been operational for just over a year, it is too early to judge its success, although Director Joe McAdoo stated that the changes in mindset of parole officers as well as the collaboration between the parole and labor departments were "monumental" successes.

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Montgomery County Pre-release Center, Maryland

For the past 25 years, Montgomery County, Maryland, has been operating a 500-bed jail that focuses on post-release. Officials have recognized the two greatest factors in recidivism—unemployment and substance abuse—and have designed a program to address both in a holistic manner.

What began as a work-release center for the county jail has developed into a holistic treatment center for employment services, substance abuse counseling and life skills training. The program recruits inmates with at least six months left on their sentence in county jail and transfers them to the facility. The program requires inmates to obtain full-time employment or training, while also participating in a rigorous schedule of group counseling, life skills and addiction recovery seminars. Emphasis is placed on inmates evaluating their lifestyles, determining the necessary changes and practicing workable strategies in a supportive environment. Cited by the U.S. Department of Justice as an exemplary model, one of the keys to Montgomery's success is addressing issues that can affect recidivism of ex-offenders, like substance abuse and domestic violence, while maintaining a focus on employment and re-entry into the community.

The work-release coordinators play an integral role in the program, through aggressive job development and placement in the community to job readiness and retention courses for inmates. Their efforts have placed ex-offenders in positions with starting wages averaging almost $9 an hour, and the majority in semi-skilled and skilled positions, including construction and web-site design. The program has a policy of not placing more than two ex-offenders at the same job site. Program data reveal that 96 percent of inmates were employed when released from the facility and 95 percent had cash savings (Seleznow, 2000).

Ohio—Offender Job Linkage

Ohio began Offender Job Linkage in 1997 as a response to Truth in Sentencing initiatives and to an escalating prison population, ranked fifth in the nation. In an effort to lower recidivism rates and thus prison populations and their expenses, the state began coordinating prison job fairs to educate employers and address their concerns about hiring ex-offenders. Director James Mayer contends that many employers have legitimate concerns about theft and the safety of other employees if they hire an ex-offender. However, bringing employers into prisons helped put these concerns into a realistic perspective.

Offender Job Linkage also recognizes the pre-existing agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs) involved with workforce development issues and tries to make connections between these groups and ex-offenders, instead of reinventing the wheel. Of the 32 prisons in Ohio, 27 have a three-week pre-release seminar with a contracted community agency, such as Goodwill Industries, a local community college or the local Private Industry Council (PIC). However, the development of these partnerships has not always been easy. Some community-based organizations believed that ex-offenders are harder to work with than other groups and did not want to get involved. And ex-offenders had little knowledge about the resources available to them for finding employment or further training once released.

Ohio has also been able to address the geographical mismatch between where inmates are incarcerated and where they expect to be released. Almost 80 percent of inmates in Ohio plan to return to the Cleveland area but are in prisons around the state. To address this issue, Job Linkage uses video conferencing for inmates to interview for positions while they are still incarcerated.

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Nonprofit Ex-Offender Programs

The majority of existing ex-offender employment programs are run by local nonprofit organizations. For this report, five organizations were examined (the case studies appear in the Appendix). In identifying models of employment programs for ex-offenders, the first challenge was to find programs. Many small programs work with ex-offenders as a part of larger, broader-based organizations, but few stand alone.

The selected programs highlight a variety of approaches to the same issue. At their core, the programs share the same basic strategy and program elements: job readiness courses, job assessment and development, and postplacement activities.

This common strategy stems from a critical need among ex-offenders—quick employment and income. While occupational skills training and basic education are needed by many ex-offenders, most are released from prison with little or no money, and their first priority is to find a job.

Most programs focus their energies on coaching participants through interviews, particularly on how to respond to the application or interview question "Have you ever been convicted of a crime?"; identifying employers willing to hire ex-offenders; matching participants to jobs; and providing follow-up services.

However, one key difference among ex-offender programs is in their primary goals: increased employment versus reduced recidivism. Some programs have explicit goals of reducing recidivism and use employment as the primary vehicle for decreasing re-arrests, re-convictions and re-incarcerations. These programs typically have additional components to help address a larger variety of issues, such as substance abuse and character development, rather than focusing solely on employment. These programs often draw distinct differences between themselves and "regular" employment and training programs.

Conversely, the only goal of several programs is to find employment for ex-offenders. While they admit that finding employment probably does contribute to reduced recidivism, that is not their mission. They are acutely aware of all the other influences in ex-offenders' lives, including substance abuse and personal relationships, that could lead to a return to crime, but they do not believe employment programs should be held accountable for addressing these other issues.

The implications of this division among practitioners in the field are noteworthy. Because there is no consensus on the goal of ex-offender employment programs, there is no consensus on how success should be judged. Outcome measures could include employment retention or recidivism rates as well as others. Also, the contrast raises questions about the ability of criminal justice and workforce development agencies to collaborate in these ventures. While the goals of increased employment and reduced recidivism certainly overlap, coordinating the activities of these organizations and funders with divergent goals and outcomes poses a challenge.

From the participants' perspective, these differences within the field are arbitrary, given all the "responsibilities of release." As a condition of their release into the community, persons placed on parole or probation are routinely required to adhere to such rules as abstaining from drugs and alcohol, avoiding contact with known offenders, maintaining steady employment, and reporting to probation or parole officers.

One issue discussed at length by ex-offenders in focus groups is the difficulty they face in meeting these obligations. For many ex-offenders, finding employment is just one of several responsibilities required for release. Particularly for ex-offenders convicted of drug offenses, additional responsibilities can include drug counseling, random

drug screenings, day reporting and meetings with parole officers. Ex-offenders insisted that finding a job flexible enough to accommodate all their other requirements was difficult and, if such a job were found, managing their time to fulfill all these obligations was their biggest challenge.

Furthermore, many supports that could aid ex-offenders in their transition back into their communities are not available. For example, with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, individuals with drug felony convictions are permanently ineligible to receive federal welfare benefits and food stamps, though some states have adopted legislation opting out of or modifying the federal ban, such as exempting individuals who have undergone drug treatment or limiting the ban to a finite period (Legal Action Center, Public Assistance Laws, 2000). Similar obstacles are in place regarding public housing: housing can be denied to individuals who are registered sex offenders or who have engaged in drug-related or violent criminal activities "that would adversely affect the health, safety or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises." In addition, public housing agencies have a right to obtain criminal records for tenants and applicants (Legal Action Center, Housing Laws, 2000).

Program Characteristics

Demographics of Participants

The typical participant in ex-offender employment programs examined for this report is a male, black or Hispanic, in his 20s or early 30s, with little previous work experience and a high school diploma or less. Most, between 70 and 95 percent, were convicted of nonviolent drug-related offenses. Many programs only work with nonviolent offenders, but increasingly some (e.g., Better People, Safer and South Forty) are willing to work with all offenders.

Better People—A Portland, Oregon, program focuses on changing the way ex-offenders think, through the cognitive behavioral model moral reconation therapy (MRT) in conjunction with job placement and retention services, to achieve the goal of reduced recidivism. The program only places participants in "living wage" jobs, paying at least $8 an hour with benefits. Started in 1998 and funded entirely with private funds, Better People enrolled 153 participants during its first year of operations and reports a 59 percent retention rate through 180 days.

Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO)—A New York City program serves nearly 1,800 work releasees, parolees and probationers each year. Its two-pronged approach provides immediate employment opportunities through the Neighborhood Work Project as well as job preparation skills and job development assistance through the Vocational Development Program. With over 20 years of experience, CEO reports a 65 percent placement rate and works with over 300 companies.

Based in Chicago, the **Safer Foundation** is the largest community-based ex-offender program in the country, serving 2,800 ex-offenders with job assessment, support services and job placement assistance. Safer focuses attention on those ex-offenders who are not job ready by providing an innovative educational program to prepare clients for the GED. Safer also runs several in-prison components, including educational courses in the Cook County jail and management of the largest work-release center in Illinois. Safer has achieved a 41 percent placement rate, which it defines as employment for 30 days.

South Forty Corporation—Over the past 30 years, South Forty has worked with a variety of ex-offender populations in New York City, including work releasees, probationers, parolees and parents of juvenile offenders. Through an aggressive, systematic program of job preparation and job development, South Forty works with over 2,000 ex-offenders per year, with placement rates ranging from 70 to 85 percent, depending on the program. Through its Private Sector Advisory Committee, South Forty has developed strong relationships with employers, who provide not only job openings but also other resources for the organization. South Forty also offers prerelease services for inmates in some New York City jails.

Virginia CARES (Community Action Re-Entry System)—This statewide collaboration of community action agencies combines life skills seminars in 27 correctional facilities with post-release services in 39 cities and counties throughout the state. Job-readiness seminars, placement assistance and retention are the cornerstones of the program, with additional emergency services (housing, clothing and food). The Roanoke office, operated by Total Action Against Poverty (TAP), was visited for this report. It serves 200 inmates in local correctional facilities and an additional 200 ex-offenders with post-release services. TAP also operates an innovative fatherhood program for ex-offenders.

These demographics mirror the characteristics of the current prison population, where 89 percent are men and 57 percent are black or Hispanic. However, two important demographic shifts are taking place in prison and will have repercussions for post-release programs. First, the average age of inmates is increasing: inmates aged 35 and older are now a larger percentage of the prison population than are those under 35. Furthermore, more offenders are being incarcerated for violent offenses, currently making up 47 percent of the prison population and accounting for 50 percent of prison growth in the last 10 years (Beck and Mumola, 1999).

Many directors spoke of the changing demographics of the ex-offenders being released and sent to their programs. They have seen a marked decline in educational skills and more ex-offenders arriving with no work experience. In addition, current programs are working with many ex-offenders who were convicted and sentenced under the tougher drug laws in the 1980s. However, as more inmates are being convicted of violent offenses, this may become an important issue for the ex-offender programs who work only with nonviolent offenders.

Relationship with Criminal Justice System

A primary difference between ex-offender programs and other employment and training programs is their relationship to criminal justice agencies. State and local departments of corrections and parole are sources of funding and participants for many ex-offender programs. Almost all programs operate in a formal relationship with local or state criminal justice agencies, or both. For most, this relationship consists of formal contracts to provide post-release services, primarily job search assistance, for a certain number of clients per year.

Program operators agree that good working relationships with parole officers are a key to success. CEO Executive Director Mindy Tarlow sees parole "as the linchpin that

holds the program together." The involvement of parole or probation officers gives programs additional leverage to work with ex-offenders, for whom participation is often a condition of release. Program staff often keep in contact with parole officers, particularly after a placement has been made, to help deal with any issues that may emerge. While practitioners contend that working with criminal justice agencies is critical, they are quick to point out the need for distinct separation. "We don't want to be seen as part of the system," said South Forty President John Rakis. "Participants don't trust the system and, for us to be successful, we need to build trust with them."

Better People is the only program examined that does not have a formal relationship with the criminal justice system. However, the program has strong working relationships with local parole officers to recruit new participants, and has gained access to local jails and prisons to present the program to potential participants.

The Safer Foundation has the most significant association with the criminal justice system, with their in-prison courses at the PACE Institute and their management of the Crossroads Community Correctional work-release facility. However, senior staff at Safer consider the pre- and post-release connection important and say clients look at post-release services as "graduating to Safer," without thinking of it as part of the system.

Working with Employers

All five programs emphasize the importance of strong relationships with employers. Again, there are similarities. First, programs present themselves as a free human resources department for employers. The pitch to most employers is that traditional recruiting practices, such as want ads and job fairs, do not inform employers sufficiently about potential employees. Through ex-offender employment programs, potential employers are assured of getting qualified, screened applicants for available positions. This service is particularly appealing to small- and medium-sized companies that do not have formal human resources departments.

As with all job development, success hinges on personal relationships between program staff and potential employers. Most job developers focus on placing individuals in appropriate positions rather than addressing whether companies are willing to hire ex-offenders. The job-development strategy at South Forty is an excellent example. Job developers call companies with available positions for which they have suitable candidates and describe the program. This type of cold calling often results in questions about hiring ex-offenders, particularly about potential theft and the safety of other employees, but few commitments beyond agreeing to look over program materials. South Forty then follows up with several resumes of qualified candidates. As one staff member said, "People (employers) respond to people, not to programs or policies." And for the companies that say they cannot hire ex-offenders, South Forty firmly believes in maintaining relationships with them for other organizational needs, such as guest speakers for seminars, meeting space for events, or possibly even financial contributions.

In terms of types of employment, generally speaking, programs have had success in fields where criminal backgrounds are less of a barrier, particularly construction and manufacturing. These positions pay relatively well but often provide only seasonal or part-time work. Programs have also had success in placing participants in jobs that match the work skills they were able to obtain in prison, specifically food service, maintenance and sanitation. Other sectors, particularly such direct-care work as child care and health care, are restricted for ex-offenders.

Better People takes an innovative approach to working with employers. First, they use several temporary staffing organizations to

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place participants while they complete their moral reconation therapy (MRT) sessions.[2] Better People then focuses on changing the hiring policies of major local employers. For instance, the local utility company's hiring practices barred ex-offenders from employment until they had been out of the criminal justice system for at least seven years. Better People used current research on ex-offenders and recidivism to question the company's seven-year rule. After many meetings, the company began reviewing its policy and interviewing Better People participants for positions.

One other critical role for these programs is to educate employers about ex-offenders as a potential pool of candidates. Certainly, allaying fears and concerns about safety and theft are important. At the same time, highlighting the fact that programs provide qualified participants is the best tool for educating employers. "If we provide them with quality people," said Rosana Anderson, director of TAP/VA CARES, "they will come back when they have new openings." In discussions with potential employers, programs often describe the opportunities inmates have taken advantage of in prison to learn solid work skills. At the same time, programs can tout their postplacement services and the fact that they will continue to be involved in the participant's life after placement to help ensure success. Some organizations even go so far as to extend their free human resources services to other employees of the company, not just the program's participants.

Not surprisingly, a key issue in educating and building relationships with employers is demonstrating how they can benefit from hiring ex-offenders. Two tools in this effort are the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and the Federal Bonding Program. WOTC offers employers a tax credit of up to $2,400 of the first-year wages for each qualified hire, which includes low-income ex-offenders. The Federal Bonding Program[3] helps counter employers' concerns about theft by newly hired ex-offenders. The program offers free of charge an insurance bond of up to $5,000 against theft, forgery, larceny or embezzlement by employees. The program is an important incentive for hiring ex-offenders, as many other insurance companies will not offer coverage for employees who are ex-offenders.

Role of the Strong Economy

Another issue related to working with employers is the availability of jobs for ex-offenders. As the human resources director of a hotel chain in Roanoke said, "We just need warm bodies." Companies that would not have hired ex-offenders previously are doing so now because of the tight labor market. A recent *Wall Street Journal* article highlighted a number of employers like Tom Ahl, a car dealer, whose "disinclination to hire ex-convicts diminished when the unemployment rate dipped below 5 percent. Suddenly, people released from the three prisons that ring Lima (Ohio) represented a labor pool he could not ignore" (Tatge, 2000). However, in a roundtable discussion with employers, when pressed about what would happen if the economy slows down, one human resources director said, "we could be more choosy in who we hire," implying that they would not be as willing to hire ex-offenders in the future.

However, several program directors were not convinced that the strength of the economy is making their jobs any easier. Mindy Tarlow at CEO was acutely aware of the "finite nature of the low-skilled labor market" and concerned that with the current environment to move women from welfare into the same types of jobs in which CEO has traditionally placed their men "eventually the jobs will run out." John Rakis also commented that even though the economy is strong, "we are still working just as hard to place our guys in jobs."

Recruitment and Outreach

Unlike other workforce development programs, recruitment and outreach is not a problem for those dealing with ex-offenders. In fact, over the past several years, many of the programs highlighted have greatly expanded the number of clients they serve each year. For instance, between 1994 and 1997, CEO's enrollments nearly doubled from just over 1,000 to 1,800.

For some ex-offenders, assignment to a program is an automatic part of their release. For instance, in New York, all inmates in boot camp[1] who will be returning to New York City are assigned to CEO. However, for other programs with direct connections to criminal justice agencies, but not "automatic referrals," staff have had to be proactive in urging parole and probation officers to send appropriate people. A program director at South Forty said: "[The agency] was sending us the people they didn't want to deal with, their most problematic cases." He addressed the situation by visiting each of the local offices and meeting with parole and probation officers, explaining what South Forty was trying to achieve and who, from their caseloads, would be most appropriate for referral.

For others without automatic referrals, the reputation of the program and word of mouth are the primary recruitment tools. As the director of TAP/VA CARES, Rosana Anderson, stated, "Our biggest competition is the street. If word on the street is that we help folks, then our job is half done."

Transitional Employment

In focus groups with ex-offenders, the top priority after being released was quickly finding employment to earn money. One opportunity to do so is through transitional employment. While few programs are currently able to pursue this approach, it is an area many programs want to develop in the future, not only to meet the immediate needs of ex-offenders but also as a means of diversifying their funding base.

Of the programs examined, CEO has the most extensive transitional work component. The Neighborhood Work Project (NWP) is designed specifically to provide immediate work and cash, as well as valuable work experience for ex-offenders who have little or none. Through their relationship with the State Department of Parole, CEO is able to secure contracts with other state agencies to provide general building maintenance, grounds keeping and painting services. Participants are paid the federal minimum wage and receive checks daily—within one week of release, many of CEO's participants have cash in hand. Each of the 40 work crews is assigned a full-time field supervisor who not only teaches participants how to use the tools and equipment for the job but also teaches basic work skills, such as dressing appropriately for work and getting there on time every day. Perhaps most important, participants can be terminated from NWP; causes for termination include theft, threatening or assaulting staff or co-workers, and refusal to accept an appropriate job offer. Lesser offenses, such as tardiness or absenteeism, initiate a three-tiered disciplinary process, which can also result in termination.

Better People also offers participants a transitional work experience through connections with temporary agencies. Once ex-offenders begin the MRT sessions, job developers are able to place participants with temporary firms while seeking full-time employment. Better People is able to use such a strategy because its population is by and large better qualified —both in terms of education (almost all have a high school diploma or GED upon entering the program) and work skills (the majority have some previous work experience)—than is that of other ex-offender employment programs.

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When TAP/VA CARES began its program in Roanoke in 1976, it used a transitional employment model, known as Stop Gap jobs. With financing through the federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), TAP/VA CARES was able to provide ex-offenders a three-month program of work and counseling—half the day working and the other half in group or individual counseling. The minimum-wage jobs were coordinated through the local CETA office and were aimed at ex-offenders who had spent at least three years in prison. The program worked well, with an 87 percent placement rate and a 5 percent recidivism rate over the three years of its existence. Like other temporary work experiences, it provided ex-offenders real work experience while they earned needed cash. The program was eliminated in 1980 because of federal funding cuts, but VA CARES is exploring new opportunities to begin a similar program.

Another ex-offender program, Pioneer Human Services in Seattle, has been one of the leaders in the field of transitional employment for ex-offenders and other hard-to-serve participants. Over the past 35 years, the organization has established self-supporting businesses with an array of training and rehabilitative services. Pioneer operates six work-release centers in the greater Seattle area, as well as an array of enterprises, including Pioneer Food Service, which includes an institutional food service program and the management of Mezza Café and Pronto Deli in the Starbucks corporate headquarters; Pioneer Distribution, which includes warehousing, subassembly and food buying services; Pioneer Industries, which provides light metal manufacturing services; and Greater Seattle Printing and Mailing. Furthermore, Pioneer recently launched a consulting component to assist other organizations aiming to develop transitional work programs.

Postplacement Services

Like most workforce development organizations, those serving ex-offenders have a difficult time keeping people in jobs once they are placed. The first 30 days are the most critical, so much so that the Safer Foundation does not even count a placement until the participant has been working for 30 days. As program staff stated, "We do whatever it takes to keep them in a job," and the issues can run the gamut, from child care and transportation to housing and substance abuse. For most programs, addressing these issues requires referrals to other organizations. Few programs have the in-house capacity to meet all of an ex-offender's needs.

Several of the programs examined have begun developing specific strategies for providing postplacement services and helping participants keep their jobs. Better People has a full-time staff person, known as a "corporate representative for job retention," dedicated to working with both participants and employers to keep the ex-offenders on the job. For the first 30 days, contact with the employer and the participant is on a weekly basis. Contact with the participant usually occurs during his or her continued participation in MRT sessions after placement;[5] contact with employers is a combination of face-to-face meetings and telephone conversations. Better People staff meet with the participant's immediate supervisor to discuss issues surrounding job performance, including punctuality, ability to do the required job, attention to detail and ability to get along with co-workers. This feedback from the supervisor is then shared with participants to continue to improve their current job performance or, if they are dismissed, to address the reasons why. After the first 30 days, contact with employers continues on a monthly basis for a year.

The corporate representative stressed that building this type of relationship with businesses takes time: "Frankly, some companies don't want anything to do with

us and will only verify employment [of the participant]. But others are very cooperative and appreciative of our retention efforts. The key is to find out which one is which and devote your energy in the right place."

Similarly, the Safer Foundation has designated staff, known as "lifeguards," who work with clients over the first year after placement. Their focus is to help clients cope with many of the stresses associated with working, such as securing child care or public assistance benefits. Staff focus on teaching participants problem-solving techniques. The lifeguard meets with clients weekly for the first three to four months after placement and then once or twice a month for the remainder of the year. Safer staff recognize the wide variety of issues faced by their clients and have started several in-house prevention and education programs on such issues as substance abuse and HIV/AIDS.

VA CARES, and its development within community action agencies, has an almost "built-in" system of support for participants. Many of the services needed by ex-offenders are provided within the same overarching agency. Whether it be substance abuse counseling, referrals to longer-term training programs or emergency housing, clients are able to access all of these by literally walking down the hall.

Finally, South Forty has merged with the Osborne Association to expand the scope of services available to ex-offenders. For over 60 years, the Osborne Association has provided a wide range of services to offenders, ex-offenders and their families, including substance abuse treatment, health services, family counseling, legal services, and HIV/AIDS education and counseling. With this merger, South Forty clients will be linked to Osborne's services, allowing for a more comprehensive approach to facilitate ex-offenders' re-integration into their communities.

One feature common to all programs is additional job placement services after the initial placement. In most programs, a participant who loses a job is always welcome back to receive additional services. And for participants who have been working well at their current placements, job developers offer assistance in making the transition to better positions. While this is not a formal part of any program and not actively sought by most clients, it is offered.

Staffing

Across all the programs, executive directors identified staff as one of the critical keys to success. While the size of staffs ranges from 3 to 200, all directors commented on the difficulty in retaining experienced staff, particularly job developers. As Mindy Tarlow said, "We can't compete with private placement firms."

Training of staff was identified by several executive directors as being very important in motivating and retaining their staff. Both Better People and South Forty spend significant time and resources on staff training, either in specific skills like the MRT counseling for Better People or in basic professional development in such skills as team-building, communication and technology.

Almost all sites take a team approach to their work. For instance, South Forty begins every day with a senior staff meeting to review the progress of each current client and new job development leads. At Better People, all three staff people evaluate each participant as he or she is placed, continues through the MRT sessions and graduates from the program.

While the team approach is useful, two organizations, CEO and Safer, use a performance-based incentive structure, particularly for their job developers. While some organizations do not want to promote competition among staff members, these two groups say this is the nature of the work of job developers. "They are

salespeople," said Diane Williams of Safer. "Many of them come from the private sector and they are used to it." For instance, CEO developed an incentive system for job developers based on the number of jobs developed and placements made. However, for staff with less quantifiable outcomes, performance outcomes were also created, based on such elements as judgment, communication and self-management. These are then translated into scores used as incentives for those staff as well.

In addition, almost all the programs hire ex-offenders as staff members. As one program director said, "It is tremendously important that these guys know that I am giving it to them straight because they know I have been where they are."

Funding

There are as many sources of funding as there are types of ex-offender programs. Most receive contracts from public agencies, including corrections, parole and probation at the state and local levels. Others also receive workforce development dollars, specifically Job Training Partnership Act and Welfare-to-Work funds.

Budgets range from around $100,000 per year for TAP/VA CARES to over $9 million at the Safer Foundation. However, these annual budgets do not include significant in-kind contributions from collaborating agencies. As Rosana Anderson of TAP/VA CARES said, "We are hustlers, we beat all the bushes to get the services we need for our clients."

Some of the agencies have unusual funding patterns. VA CARES, which was created by the federal Community Service Administration in the 1970s, had its own line item until recently within the Commonwealth budget, among Department of Justice programs. This sole funding source made it very vulnerable to political whims, as witnessed by the elimination of the line item in 1996. VA CARES now bids annually for program funds from the Virginia Department of Justice along with 12 other organizations. At the same time, Better People in Portland has been entirely privately funded through local foundations and private donors, particularly members of its board of directors. Executive Director Chip Shields is very proud of this independent status and would like it to remain that way: "With government funds come government priorities, and we want to address all the needs of our clients, not just those the government identifies."

Challenges for Ex-Offender Practitioners

Continuity of Services

While recruitment and referrals are not a problem for most ex-offender programs, creating continuity between program activities inside and outside of prison remains a challenge. Practitioners believe strengthening that link is crucial to improved outcomes.

The lack of continuity is manifested in several ways. On the most basic level, ex-offenders are leaving prison without the simple documentation needed to begin job searching, such as identification cards and driver's licenses. Staff at CEO describe spending at least one day of the participants' orientation obtaining documents, like Social Security cards, that could easily have been secured before the participant left prison. On another level, there are major disconnects between the services offered inside and outside of prison. James Mayer from Ohio Job Linkage said that one of the major frustrations for ex-offenders coming out is having to go through the same battery of tests and assessments they completed in prison, thus delaying receipt of "real services." It is this duplication of effort that discourages many ex-offenders from participating in programs. Georgia's TOPSTEP offers continuity of services, with assessments, tests and information about inmates' work in prison passed directly on to counselors at the Department of Labor upon release.

TAP/VA CARES has the most comprehensive continuity between in-prison and out-of-prison programming. In 27 state correctional facilities, VA CARES works in conjunction with corrections staff to conduct life skills seminars for inmates scheduled to be released in the next six months. Facilities use VA CARES expertise in a variety of ways, from individual sessions on specific topics to week-long seminars. It is these same counselors who staff VA CARES regional offices around the state. So not only are inmates introduced to the programs and resources they can expect from VA CARES, in many instances they are introduced to the staff themselves. Having that connection, with a name and a face and the beginning of a relationship, is a crucial element in encouraging ex-offenders to take advantage of re-entry services. However, this connection is not automatic; ex-offenders are not required to attend or be assigned to VA CARES upon their release. So the continuity exists only for those who choose to take advantage of it.

Expanding Workforce Development Strategies

While many of these programs have been successful for over 20 years, they are adding new program components that strengthen the employability of ex-offenders. As mentioned, many programs wish to develop their own transitional work experience programs to provide quick employment.

However, several practitioners recognize that with limited work experiences and skills many participants will not be able to move beyond the entry-level jobs in which they are initially placed. To address this issue, practitioners would like to begin offering occupational skills training for ex-offenders, such as basic education toward the attainment of a GED or computer office skills, to allow them to upgrade their skills after they have started working. "We want to become career counselors, not just job developers," said one job developer at South Forty. "Besides, if we can move him into a higher position, we can backfill his job with another client."

Impact of Welfare Reform

As mentioned, welfare reform has been regarded as one of the primary factors in the development and expansion of employment programs for ex-offenders, particularly at the state level. Many program operators believe that the types of programs that have been successful for welfare recipients could also be helpful for ex-offenders. Specifically, comparing the demographics in terms of age, educational levels and work histories, the TANF and ex-offender populations are very similar. In fact, the Safer Foundation received a grant from the Illinois Department of Human Services to implement a welfare-to-work program in 1999 to serve ex-offenders, mostly women, who receive welfare and have custody of their children.

At the same time, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), which fundamentally altered the welfare system, includes several new provisions that are now having an effect on many of the ex-offenders enrolled in employment programs, specifically provisions relating to paternity establishment and child support. Key goals of PRWORA are to increase paternity establishment rates and child support orders. To achieve these goals, states have been given a variety of child support enforcement options, such as revoking licenses and imposing work requirements on delinquent, noncustodial parents of children whose custodial parents are receiving TANF benefits, as well as creating a system for mandatory reporting of new hires. In addition, welfare recipients not complying with these new rules can have their benefits reduced through sanctions (Yates, 1997).

These new requirements are becoming an increasingly important issue for ex-offenders. The majority of offenders are parents: 63 percent of men and 78 percent of women in jail have children under the age of 18 (Harlow, 1994). Furthermore, most parents lose custody of their children when incarcerated; thus, when they are released, they are identified as noncustodial parents and subject to these new rules.

Many practitioners identified the new requirements for collecting child support from noncustodial parents as being a major issue for their participants. As their clients begin working, the new hire registry informs the child support enforcement agency and can begin automatically withholding wages for child support payments, including arrears. Given that ex-offenders most likely were not paying child support while in prison, upon release the arrears and new orders can have a significant impact on their paychecks. Clients have begun asking employment programs for assistance in dealing with these issues, and programs have begun examining the feasibility of providing assistance. The key will be working with the child support enforcement agency to make the orders themselves more reflective of the circumstances of recently released and newly employed parents.

But financial obligations are only part of parenthood. Many ex-offenders also want to re-establish personal relationships with their children when they are released from prison. TAP/VA CARES has a Fathers and Families program that takes deliberate steps to make that happen. Like its employment program, the fatherhood program begins with a support group in prison, helping men accept their responsibilities as fathers when they are released and building character as individuals. Currently, the program operates at only one correctional facility. Upon release, ex-offenders can join a variety of fatherhood components offered by TAP/VA CARES, including a support group that pairs mentors with recently released fathers and meets three days a week (with morning, midday and evening hours), and a family night, which meets once a month to address issues of lifestyle and family relationships. For fathers who are required to have supervised visits with their children (often the case for ex-offenders), TAP offers its offices as a neutral site and provides staff to supervise the visits between clients and their children.

Moving Forward

Over the past 20 years, the public's attitude toward crime and criminals has become considerably tougher, resulting in the imposition of mandatory minimum sentences, greater spending on new prisons, and reductions in in-prison services, such as education, skills training, and job preparation. With few opportunities for pre- and post-release services, ex-offenders returning to their communities are faced with a lack of resources—both in income and in the skills and knowledge necessary to enter the workforce. Though ex-offenders are the most directly affected by this lack of investment and preparation, in the end, society pays a price as well. As many practitioners noted, ex-offenders can be easily led back into the activities that landed them in prison if services to address their immediate needs are not offered. Given the few programs in existence today that specifically address the needs of the 500,000 prisoners released each year, the prospect for continued criminal activity remains high.

To strengthen the field of employment programs for ex-offenders and increase the likelihood of a smooth and productive transition from prison back to communities, practitioners, policymakers and researchers noted five areas that need attention.

Supporting More Effective Practices

All practitioners expressed a desire for opportunities to learn from one another to improve their programs. In most cases, each organization was the only one in its area addressing the employment needs of ex-offenders, leaving directors and staff feeling a sense of isolation in their work. Practitioners said that if nothing else comes of the current interest in ex-offender programs, ways should be found to provide opportunities for communication and collaboration across programs.

To address these issues, serious consideration should be given to the development of a center for employment of ex-offenders. Such an entity could support the field by providing technical assistance to nonprofit and government agencies working to improve employment prospects for ex-offenders through documenting effective approaches and programs and facilitating training for program staff; expanding the network of practitioners to include those who provide substance abuse, housing, legal, and other workforce development services; focusing attention on key policy issues affecting individuals with criminal records; and identifying and disseminating research and evaluations on issues of employment and ex-offenders.

Combining Income and Skills Development

On an operational level, programs need to experiment with a variety of approaches in order to address a fundamental tension in their work. On the one hand, every focus group member and program operator emphasized the importance of helping ex-offenders find immediate employment to meet their need for income. On the other hand, participants' longer-term success in the labor market will depend on their ability to develop skills and contacts—things that they are not likely to gain in the jobs that are immediately available to them when they leave prison. New and expanded employment programs need to experiment with ways of combining work and skills development to meet these two critical needs simultaneously (Stillman, 1999). Such efforts will need to be accompanied by longer-term employment retention and advancement support once participants begin full-time jobs.

Improving Continuity of Services

In discussing challenges and frustrations, practitioners of state-led initiatives and nonprofit organizations shared the same concern about a lack of continuity between pre- and post-release services. Those working within the criminal justice system cited a lack of information about available resources for ex-offenders and the diffi-

culty of establishing collaborations with workforce development organizations. Nonprofits discussed "wasted opportunities" to begin working with participants while still in prison, specifically collecting the basic paperwork and information needed to begin searching for employment upon release. Basic documentation—such as birth certificates and Social Security cards, training and educational certificates, and test results from programs completed in prison—would go a long way in preparing ex-offenders to begin post-release programs.

Practitioners also voiced a need to have more collaboration with other workforce development professionals. Many believed their programs are not that different from traditional employment and training programs and that there should be more opportunities for collaboration. In addition, other workforce development agencies, particularly one-stop centers, have access to information and services that would be very useful to ex-offenders.

One other issue about continuity that deserves mention is the role of prison industries. Most federal and many state correctional facilities have established in-house programs where inmates work regular hours at a real job, gaining skills and earning money for restitution fees and child support. Prison industries have been able to contract with outside vendors for products, such as uniforms and furniture, or for services, such as highway maintenance and printing. Some of those interviewed expressed an interest in more active collaborations between prison industries and ex-offender employment programs. Specifically, more effort should be made to connect the type of work conducted in prison with available jobs upon release. Georgia's TOPSTEP has made strides in this area, as has Florida's Prison Rehabilitation Industries and Diversified Enterprises, Inc. (PRIDE) program.[7]

However, one of the major obstacles to continuity of services is the stark difference in the cultures in and out of prison. Many program directors discussed the need to work more on intangibles with their clients—cooperating with co-workers, respecting the authority of supervisors, and challenging ex-offenders to think about themselves, their lifestyles and their decision-making processes. "They can't do that in prison," said John Rakis of South Forty. "The norm and culture of prison are too different than the outside. We have to wait until they are in the real world again before we can start dealing with these issues."

Increasing Investment

Our reconnaissance found that few employment programs focused on ex-offenders. The programs we found are constrained by the limited public resources that are available. While there are some private resources available through foundations and other philanthropic vehicles, given the magnitude of the issue, there is a need for more public resources to expand the infrastructure of organizations that can help facilitate the connection of ex-offenders to the labor market. While some federal and state agencies have taken the lead in piloting new programs, a portion of the unspent TANF surpluses would be well spent investing in employment programs for ex-offenders.

Expanding Research Efforts

Across the board, practitioners described the dearth of knowledge about what makes effective employment programs for ex-offenders as a major impediment to the future growth of the field. As Diane Williams said, "We have to be able to show that we are making a difference." In addition, more research is needed on the connection between employment and recidivism.

Endnotes

1 This section relies heavily on the work of Bushway and Reuter (1997).

2 For further discussion of MRT, see the Better People case study in the appendix.

3 The Federal Bonding Program is coordinated through State Employment Service offices or One-Stop Centers, or both.

4 Also known as shock incarceration, boot camp programs vary tremendously but often focus on regimented discipline for participants, similar to military basic training, as well as some educational programming, and drug and alcohol treatment.

5 Participants are placed after having completed Step 3 of the 12-Step Program but continue participating in MRT sessions for another two to four months.

6 Previously, VA CARES worked in all state correctional facilities with its own life-skills curriculum. In 1995, the Virginia Department of Corrections instituted its own life skills curriculum. Since then, 27 facilities have requested assistance from VA CARES in implementing the program.

7 For more information on PRIDE, visit www.pridefl.org.

8 Designed by Correctional Counseling, Inc., MRT is used in over 20 state prison systems. One study of MRT's use in the Oklahoma Department of Corrections concluded that "individuals who participate in MRT showed a moderate but statistically significant drop in misconduct and recidivism (MacKenzie and Brame, 1995).

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Appendix: Case Studies

Better People
Portland, Oregon

Through his work with a variety of employment and ex-offender programs, founder and Executive Director Chip Shields recognized that ex-offenders were losing jobs at the same rate, regardless of the starting pay. From that, he hypothesized that a successful program would have to address ex-offenders' belief systems and decision-making processes to make a real difference. Thus, Better People was formed in 1998 with a goal of reducing recidivism through the use of moral reconation therapy (MRT), with job placement and retention as tools to achieve that goal.

With no formal connection to the criminal justice system, Better People relies on community networking to recruit participants by making presentations in local and state prisons to inmates and to community groups serving ex-offenders. As one staff member said, "We don't want people here who are forced to be here." So participants must pay at least part of the $25 enrollment fee out of their own pockets (referral agencies often pick up the rest) to build a sense of ownership in the program. About 140 ex-offenders enrolled in the first year, with about 60 participating at one time in MRT classes. Most participants have a high school diploma or GED, one-third of enrollees are women, and there is an even split between white and black. While the program accepts all types of offenders, including violent offenders, most have been convicted of drug offenses.

The heart of the program is MRT.® The 12-step program uses a cognitive behavioral approach to change ex-offenders' and substance abusers' decision-making processes. Twice a week, participants attend group sessions, facilitated by Better People staff, while working through a series of exercises that address issues of honesty, trust, relationships, self-awareness and moral adjustment.

Participants also work while participating in MRT, either on jobs they have found on their own or in temporary positions developed by Better People. After completing Step 3 (usually three to four weeks), participants are sent on interviews and placed in jobs. Placements are made only with companies offering "living wages," $8-an-hour jobs with health benefits. To date, most placements have been made in the manufacturing sector, in light industrial and in some food service industries. These industries are targeted in part because of the high wages, the relative lack of concern about criminal backgrounds, and the growing number of available jobs, as many current workers in the industry "age out."

The full-time retention specialist has a strict regimen of contacts with both participants and employers during the first year after placement. During the first month, contact is weekly with employers and participants. After the first 30 days, contact is monthly. Contact with the employer alternates between telephone calls and face-to-face meetings and written evaluations of participants' work. An Alumni Club serves as an informal support group for participants and provides an avenue for feedback to the program.

In terms of performance, Better People expects attrition from the program as people begin the MRT sessions as well as after placement, with goals set at 65 percent of enrollees making it through Step 3 and 65 percent of those being placed in jobs. However, the program has very aggressive goals for retention and recidivism, and it achieved the following results during its first year of operation (1998): 97 percent of placements have remained on the job after 30 days, 78 percent after 90 days, and 59 percent after 180 days; only one person was re-arrested and returned to prison. As of September 1999, 30 people completed the entire MRT program, which usually requires four to six months.

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With a budget of $180,000 raised completely through private donations, and four full-time staff, Better People is distinctive in its larger organizational mission of advocating on issues that affect the criminal justice system and, in turn, ex-offenders. For instance, Shields is involved in efforts to reprioritize state funding for education rather than for more prisons, and he advocates restructuring of sentencing, including the elimination of the death penalty in Oregon.

Center for Employment Opportunities
New York, New York

Created by the Vera Institute of Justice in the late 1970s, the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) started as a bridge between corrections and parole. Today, nearly 1,800 ex-offenders enroll in CEO's programs each year: the majority are graduates from New York State's boot camp program; others are ex-offenders on work release or probation and other parolees. CEO accepts only nonviolent offenders, of which 95 percent have drug-related offenses. Over the past few years, the education and work-readiness levels of participants has declined; current enrollees score below the seventh-grade level in both reading and math and have limited work experience.

With a staff of 100, CEO implements an unusual two-pronged approach to providing employment services. First, the Neighborhood Work Project (NWP) offers immediate, short-term paid employment opportunities through a day-labor program providing maintenance and repair services to governmental facilities. Participants are organized in work crews of five to seven members with a full-time field supervisor, and they provide general building maintenance, grounds keeping and painting services to facilities across New York City and some surrounding counties. Participants are paid the federal minimum wage on a daily basis, which provides much needed cash for recently released offenders to continue to seek regular employment. At the same time, NWP allows participants to build work skills on the job, from the use of tools and equipment for the job to the basic work skills of dressing appropriately and getting to work on time every day. Participants typically remain in NWP for two to three months.

Participants work in NWP work crews four days a week, while concurrently participating in the Vocational Development Program (VDP). When ex-offenders arrive at CEO, they attend a week-long life skills and pre-employment workshop to learn how to prepare a resume, how to discuss their conviction with a potential employer, and other basic interview skills. On the last day, participants work with their individual employment specialists to develop an employment plan and assess their vocational skills and interests. While enrolled in NWP, participants meet with their employment specialists once a week to continue work on interviewing skills, follow up on job leads developed by employment specialists, and address needs that might impede their employment success, like obtaining housing, medical services, child care or work-related documents.

This dual strategy has proved very effective. The contracts obtained for building services generate enough revenue for NWP to be self-sustaining, while providing real work for participants. VDP has helped place participants with over 300 companies in manufacturing, food industries, customer service and office support, while maintaining a 65 percent placement rate and an average starting wage of $6.30 an hour.

CEO is unusual in the nonprofit world in how it evaluates staff. For job developers, CEO operates a commission-based environment, where job developers earn a base salary and bonuses based on their performance. With funding entities demanding more account-

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ability and performance measures, CEO instituted this performance-based management system. For other staff whose work is not so easily quantifiable, CEO engaged a consultant to develop additional standards around judgment, communication and self-management to generate scores used to calculate bonuses.

CEO expanded its budget from $6.5 million in 1994 to $8.5 million in 1999, primarily by broadening the population it serves from boot camp graduates to other ex-offenders. In describing CEO as an "after-care program of the criminal justice system," Executive Director Mindy Tarlow stresses CEO's connection with both corrections and parole as being extremely important in addressing the needs of ex-offenders.

Safer Foundation
Chicago, Illinois

Starting in 1972 with a staff of one and a budget of $44,000, the Safer Foundation has developed into the largest community-based ex-offender program in the country, with five locations, a staff of 200 and a budget topping $9 million. Headquartered in downtown Chicago, Safer currently serves 2,800 clients each year. Its basic services for ex-offenders center around assessments, support services, education and employment.

New enrollees at Safer begin with an individual assessment to determine strengths and barriers, as well as to develop a plan of action. Clients who are designated job ready begin the employment services track, including pre-employment training, job referral, placement and follow-up. The pre-employment training seminars focus on completing applications, interviewing skills and resume writing. Safer also places considerable emphasis on workplace behaviors, such as effective communication, timeliness, and respecting and responding to authority. Participants then meet with their employment counselor to begin the job referral and placement process. Staff place great emphasis on finding a good fit between employers' needs and the skill sets of participants.

In addition to working with clients, Safer staff develop relationships with employers. Keys to their success are presenting themselves as a free human resources service for companies—referring qualified applicants, providing drug testing when requested, and facilitating the use of tax credits and incentives.

Safer emphasizes employment retention. Indeed, a successful job *placement* is counted only when a participant has been working for 30 days. This definition results in a placement rate of 41 percent, although 59 percent of enrollees are placed using the traditional definition. Safer's follow-up services are the cornerstone of its efforts to meet the goal of reducing recidivism and supporting former offenders to become productive, law-abiding members of the community. To that end, Safer has specially designated case managers, known as "lifeguards," who work with participants for a year after they are placed. Not only do lifeguards help address a myriad of issues that arise, they also encourage participants not to look at their first job as the only job. They work with them to find ways to continue moving up the ladder. In addition, they conduct biweekly support groups for participants to discuss issues that arise in their work and personal lives and to help them create more realistic expectations of job growth. Recently, Safer added new education and prevention seminars on substance abuse and HIV/AIDS.

Clients who are not deemed job ready are referred for supportive services; many are mandated by their parole requirements, particularly substance abuse and mental health services. However, this is not just a pass-off to another agency. Within three weeks, the

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participant is scheduled to return to Safer for an additional assessment and enrollment in employment services activities.

Unlike most ex-offender employment programs, Safer recognizes and addresses the needs of participants who are not job ready. Its innovative educational program operates more like a work environment than a classroom. The six-week program uses small peer learning groups so students can learn from each other, and facilitators work individually with students on assignments. All the trappings of traditional education, including textbooks, have been removed to encourage participants who have not done well in school environments. By using this approach, about 45 percent of students pass the GED exam on the first attempt, having started from a fifth-grade level in reading and math. This educational approach is also used at PACE Institute (Programmed Activities for Correctional Education), the educational component of the Cook County Department of Corrections.

In addition to these core services at its central site, Safer has branched out through the years to new areas and locations. It moved downstate in 1978 and began operations in Rock Island with employment and support services. Recognizing that residents were going across the river to Rock Island to get services from Safer, the Governor of Iowa requested Safer to establish offices in Davenport in 1980.

Also in 1980, Safer assumed the management of Crossroads Community Correctional facility, the largest work-release facility in the state, which serves 265 inmates. Finally, the PACE Institute merged with Safer formally in 1986 and provides educational services to inmates in Cook County jail as well as supportive services, including Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous.

South Forty Corporation
New York, New York

Operating for over 30 years, the South Forty Corporation has provided vocational services, counseling and referrals for prisoners and ex-offenders. With both in-prison and after-care components, the programs offered at South Forty have helped move thousands into full-time positions.

Through several agencies at the state and city levels and a budget of about $2 million, South Forty has been able to serve a variety of clients, including parolees, work-release participants, probationers and, most recently, parents of juvenile offenders. Overall, South Forty works with nearly 2,000 participants each year.

Recruitment has never been a challenge Some programs, such as the work-release program, automatically send participants to South Forty every two weeks. Other programs receive clients through direct referrals from parole or probation officers, for whom South Forty is one option for referral for job placement services.

South Forty runs similarly structured programs for all the populations it serves. All programs begin at intake, with caseworkers conducting basic skills tests and assessments of each client. Participants also complete a Contract for Success, which outlines his or her employment goals, and the roles and expectations for the participant as well as the South Forty staff. Participants then begin a week-long job readiness seminar that addresses such issues as goal setting, interview skills and appropriate work behavior. On day three of the seminar, participants meet with job developers to begin discussing job

opportunities. At the same time, clients continue to meet with caseworkers to develop resumes and address other issues that could prove to be barriers to employment, such as child care arrangements or referrals to substance abuse facilities.

Critical to the success of South Forty has been its job development activities. While each program serves different populations, job leads are shared among all the developers. The basic philosophy is that employers are not interested in programs; they are interested in qualified candidates for their jobs. Job developers call potential employers who have a job opening to introduce the program and the fact that they are trying to place ex-offenders. Within two days, South Forty delivers the resumes of several potential candidates to the employer. Job developers focus on their ability to screen applicants and thus lower turnover costs for companies; their practice of immediately replacing any employee who does not work out with another candidate is a strong selling point for employers.

South Forty staff track participants' progress for six months after placement, and many participants use South Forty's open-door policy to return for referrals to additional services or better jobs after having worked successfully at their first placement.

The 43-person staff is divided into different units to work with different populations: parole, probation, work release. While the program components are the same, this differentiation allows staff to build relationships with their counterparts in the various agencies, such as parole officers or work-release center directors. And even though job developers are also assigned to different programs, they share job leads across the entire organization.

One of the keys to South Forty's success is connecting people in prison with services outside prison. Within the New York City jails, it operates the Transitional Services Program, which provides pre-release services to city prisoners. In addition, South Forty offers the use of its offices for support groups for prisoners who participate in STEP (Self-Taught Empowerment and Pride) and HIP (High Impact Program), both of which operate independently in the city jails. During the sessions, prisoners who are about to be released meet with recently released inmates to discuss the challenges and obstacles of life on the "outside." Use of their office space also serves as an informal way to introduce inmates to South Forty staff and services.

South Forty has just embarked on a merger with the Osborne Association to expand the scope of services available to ex-offenders. For over 60 years, the Osborne Association has provided a wide range of services to offenders, ex-offenders and their families, including substance abuse treatment, health services, family counseling, legal services, and AIDS/HIV education and counseling. With this merger, South Forty clients will be linked to Osborne's services, allowing for a more comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of ex-offenders as they reintegrate into their communities.

Virginia CARES (Community Action Re-Entry System)
Roanoke, Virginia

In 1975, a group of community action agencies in Virginia came together to develop a statewide system to provide re-entry services to ex-offenders, known as Virginia CARES (Community Action Re-Entry System). The agencies recognized that local parolees had a wide variety of issues to address upon their release, with employment being the most important.

Virginia CARES conducts pre-release seminars at 27 correctional facilities across the state. Working with corrections staff, VA CARES offers life skills seminars to inmates who have fewer than six months remaining of their sentence. Seminar topics include employment preparation, rebuilding relationships with families and money management, and role-playing techniques are often used. Through these pre-release sessions, inmates are already familiar with VA CARES and counselors can connect inmates with offices across the state upon release. This continuity of care is a hallmark of VA CARES' success. Even if ex-offenders do not attend the pre-release seminars, most participants hear about VA CARES through word of mouth.

There are 13 post-release centers across Virginia. Statewide, nearly 2,000 ex-offenders use VA CARES' services, while another 1,000 participate in prison; 70 percent of participants have been released from prison within the week prior to entering VA CARES offices. Approximately 80 percent of participants are African American and about 20 percent are female.

Upon the participant's release, the program first addresses his or her emergency needs of housing, food and clothes. About half of the participants continue and enroll in the employment program. Participants attend a two-week job-readiness class, which addresses how to develop a resume, conduct an interview and deal with supervisors. This job club meets twice a week, and a weekly support group addresses other personal issues related to being an ex-offender and finding employment.

Job placement usually takes place within two weeks. With an unemployment rate under 3 percent in Virginia, finding employment for ex-offenders has not been a major challenge. Most placements are made in the hospitality, food service and customer service industries. Statewide, VA CARES placed 44 percent of its participants at an average wage of $6.32 per hour in 1998.

VA CARES follows up with placed participants on a quarterly basis. However, staff believe that the continuity of care from pre- to post-release creates a strong bond that encourages participants to continue to seek help from VA CARES long after their formal participation has ended. Thus, most local offices have an open-door policy that allows ex-offenders to return for additional services. For example, the central location of the Roanoke office makes it an ideal place for impromptu support groups to meet after work.

One of the keys to VA CARES' success has been its collaboration with community action agencies (CAAs). By being incorporated within CAAs, VA CARES offices are able to address the multiple needs many ex-offenders have upon release. Housing, food and clothing are the most important emergency needs to be met. With the connection to inmates established during pre-release seminars, many of the services can be developed and planned before release. This statewide collaboration allows each office to share its best practices among the other CAAs in Virginia, in addition to participating in national CAA conferences and workshops promoting the use of CAAs as incubators for ex-offender programs.

In Roanoke, Total Action Against Poverty (TAP) is the local CAA that houses VA CARES.

TAP/VA CARES serves approximately 200 in-prison offenders with life skills classes and an additional 200 ex-offenders upon their release. With other TAP services, VA CARES can recruit additional participants, such as the parents of children attending Head Start (which is administered by TAP), or can continue services after VA CARES, such as

enrolling participants in Roanoke Works, the JTPA-funded computer applications and office skills training program, also operated by TAP.

Aside from housing and employment, another major concern addressed by the TAP/VA CARES program is the issue of parenting, particularly fatherhood. VA CARES staff have set aside space in their offices for parents to hold supervised visits with their children as a first step to becoming a part of their lives after being incarcerated. In addition, VA CARES established a fatherhood program to help fathers understand and meet their child support obligations. The program provides mentors for fathers and holds seminars on how to develop better relationships with their children.

Initially funded through a demonstration grant from the Community Service Administration and the Office of National Programs of the U.S. Department of Labor, these entities were eliminated in the early 1980s, and programs like VA CARES had to turn to the state for funding. In an effort to prove its effectiveness to state lawmakers, two studies were conducted on VA CARES. The 1983 study concluded that only 3.4 percent of Virginia CARES participants were re-convicted of a felony crime within 18 months of release compared with 11.9 percent of a matched comparison group of ex-offenders. With this evidence, VA CARES earned an appropriation through the state Department of Criminal Justice Services of about $1 million; each VA CARES office is supported through a portion of these funds, with additional support from their host CAA.

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